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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND G/IWI

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KPAO](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NOMINATION FOR SECRETARY'S
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD

REF: STATE 126072

¶1. Embassy Colombo wishes to nominate Ms. Srinithy Nandasekaran of Sri Lanka for the Secretary's International Woman of Courage Award. As one of Sri Lanka's few female attorneys from the ethnic minority Tamil population, Ms. Nandasekaran has worked tirelessly as a lawyer, judge, and human rights activist to protect the rights of civilians caught in the crossfire of Sri Lanka's 25-year ethnic conflict.

¶2. Ms. Nandasekaran's determined efforts to hold government officials and security force officers accountable for their actions have led to career demotions and threats to her life and the lives of her family members. In 2003, while serving in Kayts, an island off the Jaffna peninsula in northern Sri Lanka, Ms. Nandasekaran came under fire for ordering the return of 13 official vehicles that were being inappropriately used by the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a pro-government paramilitary group with a history of serious human rights abuses. She defied advice from a senior judge to consider the lives of her three children and withdraw the order against the EPDP. Rather than allow the case to proceed, the Government removed her from her position as Magistrate and District Judge in Kayts and transferred her to Jaffna.

¶3. Ms. Nandasekaran served in Jaffna as an Additional Magistrate from late 2003 until September 2006. While in that position, Ms. Nandasekaran allowed a case against several officers, including Lt. Col. Duminda Chanaka Keppetiwala, to proceed. Keppetiwala was then commanding officer of Nawathkuly Army Camp and is the current executive assistant to the Sri Lankan army commander. Keppetiwala was accused of overseeing the abduction and assassination of more than 30 persons in 1996-97. Because of the high profile nature of the defendant, Ms. Nandasekaran was strongly advised by colleagues on the bench to dismiss the charges and received threats from government and military leaders when she refused. She did not bow to the pressure.

¶4. Ms. Nandasekaran also played a key role in the controversial case involving the abduction and murder of Jaffna human right activist Father Jim Brown, a Catholic priest who disappeared near a military checkpoint in mid-2006. Ms. Nandasekaran had ordered the police to begin investigating the Sri Lankan Navy's alleged involvement in Father Brown's disappearance. Because of her involvement in the Keppetiwala and Father Brown cases, she was removed from her assignments and restricted to hearing only civil cases. No progress has been made in the Keppetiwala or Brown investigations since her removal from the cases. Ms. Nandasekaran was transferred from Jaffna in January 2007, shortly after sharing information with Ambassador Blake about human rights abuses in Jaffna.

¶5. Ms. Nandasekaran has been commended by human rights activists and citizens in Jaffna for her personal commitment to justice for the victims of human rights abuses, often in defiance of threats from the government and paramilitary groups. In May 2006, she provided information to the police on the massacre of 12 civilians in Alapitty, Kayts. In August 2006, she personally assisted in the rescue of 54 injured civilians from a Christian church that was under attack. As Jaffna Magistrate, she initiated a new procedure whereby victims or victims' relatives can initiate cases in the Magistrate's Court when civilians are reported missing after being taken into custody by government security forces.

¶6. When she was transferred from Jaffna to Colombo in January 2007, Ms. Nandasekaran was demoted to the Juvenile Court. Nonetheless, she has taken on the role of defending the rights of women and children with enthusiasm, saying "I don't mind. There is a lot to be done to protect the children of Sri Lanka." In several cases she has pursued justice against those accused of child abuse and violence against women, even when the perpetrators were influential officials.

¶7. Ms. Nandasekaran is richly deserving of this award. Post confirms that Nandasekaran has been notified and has consented to her nomination.

Full Name: Srinithy Nandasekaran
Title/Position: Magistrate, Colombo Juvenile Court
DOB: November 2, 1960
POB: Colombo, Sri Lanka
Citizenship: Sri Lankan
Address: 19/150 Farm Road, Mattakuliya, Colombo 15
Phone Numbers: (Home) 94-11-254-0590 (Cell)
94-77-766-0404 (Work) 94-11-258-7498

Email Address: nsrinithi@gmail.com
Passport Number: N1091144

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